SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS OF MARITAL QUALITY AMONG YOUNG COUPLES

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ABSTRACT

The prevalence of broken marriages worldwide led to the focus on marital quality among couples. This study is a correlation cross-sectional survey that utilizes a simple random sampling technique to select 300 respondents across five selected local government areas in Ibadan. A 5-likert scale self-structured questionnaire with six (6) sections. It covers respondent's demographic characteristics, Marital Quality (r 0.87), Communication (0.79), Relationship Quality (r 0.85), Mindfulness (r 0.91) and Spousal Choice (r 0.84). Pearson Correlation, ANOVA and Linear Regression were used to test the research hypotheses. Results revealed that quality of relationship ($r = 0.323$, $p < .05$); communication ($r = 0.121$, $p < .05$), and mindfulness ($r = 0.349$, $p < .05$) exerted a positive significant relationship on the quality of marriage; gender exerted negative significant relationship ($r = -0.199$, $p < .05$); choice of partner exerted a negative not-significant relationship ($r = -0.200$, $p > .05$); and education exerted a positive not-significant relationship on quality of marriage ($r = 0.072$, $p > .05$). Going by the results, relationship quality, communication, and mindfulness have a positive and statistically significant influence on marital quality. This study recommends that couples should learn each other's communication language, be mindful of spousal needs and desires, and make themselves interesting and fascinating to one another.

Keywords: Marital Quality, Socio-Psychological, Young Couples
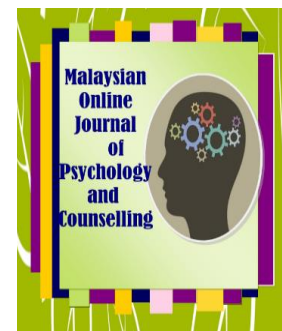
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INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of broken marriages is on the rise and has become a major issue worldwide. This problem, as observed by youth within the marriageable age, has increased the fear of commitment and permanency with another through marriage. Marriage is the process of joining two people in a specific social and legal union with the intent of working together in harmony and dependence on one another. It is also a legal ceremony of a union of a man and woman by a ceremony of law (Wong & Waite, 2015). Marriage has also been referred to as the process by which two people make their relationship public, official and permanent (American Psychological Association, 2024). Marriage, therefore, encompasses behavioural norms, duties, expectations and values connected with a man and woman's legal union. In as much as marriage is defined as a lifelong commitment, divorce, separation and other forms of negative feelings are associated with many marriages. These issues are determined by marital quality among couples.

Marital quality is a broad notion that encompasses both pleasant and unpleasant experiences in a relationship, such as feeling loved, cared for, and fulfilled, as well as negative experiences, such as marital disagreements or excessive demands from one's spouse. It is the overall assessment of a marriage or level of contentment with significant areas of the marital life. To cite Nurhayati et al. (2019), marital quality can be separated into two-dimensional concepts, namely intrapersonal (satisfaction and happiness) and interpersonal (intimacy, consensus, agreement, sexuality, harmony, conflict and disagreement). In addition, marital quality can either be positive or negative depending on certain socio-psychological variables. Several different research have been carried out on marital quality. An example is Abreu-Afonso's (2021) study which revealed that intrinsic motivation, communication, children and education are significant predictors of marital quality. Also, Leon and Lino-Crus (2023) investigated the association between love, jealousy, satisfaction, and violence in young couples using a total of 834 young people and adults between 18 and 38 years of age. They discovered that two nodes of the love variable, Commitment, and Intimacy, had a direct and moderate relationship with the Satisfaction node. The latter is the central node in the network. However, in the male group, the most intense associations are in Satisfaction-Intimacy, Violence-Passion, and Jealousy-Commitment. Likewise, Cornelius et al. (2016) explored longitudinal partner influence effects among newly parenting adolescents and young adults ($N_{couples}$ = 157) recruited from four obstetrics/gynaecology clinics in Connecticut between July 2007 and February 2011. Five health behaviours in two domains were examined: weight-related behaviours (unhealthy eating, exercise) and substance use (cigarette, alcohol, and marijuana use). It was discovered that marital quality is significant in eating behaviour, alcohol, cigarette and marijuana use. Britt and Nazarinia's (2014) study on the perception of household chores is related to relationship quality among partners from a traditional economic and a gender role theory perspective discovered that perceived unfairness in the household division of chores was predictive of women's relationship quality, but not for men. In establishing the reasons for marriage breakdown among young couples, a study conducted in Ashanti, Ghana, revealed that lack of respect, lack of responsibility, differences in decision-making, family interference, differences in values and beliefs, infidelity, and miscommunication were significant reasons for the breakdown of marriages among young couples. It was further shown that financial burden, loneliness and emotional disturbance, additional responsibility for children, temptation to commit adultery, and uncertainty put a lot of young marriages at risk of dissolution (Ameyaw et al., 2023). Considering the number of existing researches on marital quality and factors that affect marital stability, the prevalence of separation, divorce and unwillingness to be tied to a partner is still on the increase. This study, therefore, intends to contribute to the body of research by looking at common variables of marital quality but from a different cultural perspective and understanding.

Socio-psychological determinants

There are many socio-psychological factors that determine marital quality; however, this study focuses on relationship quality, communication, education, spousal choice and mindfulness, gender.

- Relationship quality is important for understanding a couple's commitment to the partnership, relationship functioning and maintenance, and stability (Abreu-Afonso, 2021; Nurhayati et al., 2019). It refers to how happy or satisfied an individual is in their relationship (Reynolds et al., 2014). Happiness and satisfaction foster the positive well-being of couples, unhappiness, and dissatisfaction can enhance emotional and psychological instability. Studies have equally revealed that marital abuse and satisfaction influence a couple's quality of life (Aroyewun et al., 2022). The study revealed a positive association between relationship quality and marriage among cohabiting parents in the Netherlands (Blom et al., 2023).

- Communication in defining marital quality cannot be over-emphasized. Quality communication in marriage is interpersonal and transactional. It is a process of sharing feelings, thoughts, needs and successes with a partner. Pleasant communication in marriage entails handshakes, smiles, profound emotional exchanges, acknowledging one another's weaknesses, grooming and touches (Awosan et al., 2023). Understanding is a key component in marriage, as it is a union of two distinct individuals with differences who have chosen to love and live together. According to Lavner et al. (2016), communication skills are the key predictor of marital quality among couples. Skills such as self-disclosure, nonverbal interpretations, frequency of successful communication, understanding between spouses and empathy were positively related to marital quality (Haris & Kumar, 2018). Similarly, communication such as criticism, defensiveness, contempt and stonewalling were all significantly and negatively correlated with marital quality and promoted divorce (Ledermann et al., 2010). Research has also revealed that change in relationship quality was revealed as significant in change in depression for both men and women (Roberson, 2014). Rahman et al. (2011), in addition, discovered that the quality of communication, especially sexual self-disclosure and openness between the partners on their sexual preferences, is important in relational satisfaction.

- Mindfulness is the intentional process of being conscious of thoughts and body to things, events and people around to enhance context sensitivity and knowledge of different points of view. In a marriage, it refers to the spousal level of awareness of certain events or occurrences in the home. The American Psychological Association (2024) described mindfulness as awareness of one's internal state and surroundings. Kabat-Zinn (2015) defines mindfulness as the awareness that arises from paying attention on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally. For instance, does a husband remember his wife's favourite colour and consider it while trying to get her a dress gift? Does the wife remember that her husband does not like to see pieces of clothing in the bathroom and keeps this to heart regardless of her own upbringing which sees no wrong in hanging one or two pieces of clothing around the bathroom? In this sense, mindfulness is a state and not a trait. It has been cited that trait mindfulness reflects the general level of being present in a situation and time, while state mindfulness refers to the extent to which one is experiencing consciousness at any given moment (Lachance-Grzela et al., 2020). Parent et al. (2014) found direct links between mindfulness and marital happiness, love and commitment, and communication skills among couples.

- Spousal choice is an important determinant of marital quality (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013). Customarily, in arranged marriages, spouses are chosen by family members based on caste, the economic status of the spouse's family, and, for brides, their virginity and reputation. Most

times, such people are not acquainted before they are engaged or may have met each other only a handful of times before marriage. On the other hand, personal spousal choice is often based on affection and personal compatibility. As such, there is a form of existing relationship before engagement and marriage. Marriages where spouses were chosen by their families may benefit more from the approval and support of family members (Chowdhry, 2007). This assertion is further corroborated in Alowolodu et al.'s (2019) investigation that showed that there exists a significant relationship between variables of traditional marriage customs and marital stability.

- Gender differences are obvious from the structure to the emotions, workability, cognitive processes and psychological differences. Gender is a social and cultural construct which distinguishes differences in attributes of men and women, girls and boys, and accordingly refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women. (UNICEF, 2017). According to the World Health Organisation (2019), gender refers to socially built features of women and men, such as conventions, roles, and connections within and between gender groups. It also differs from one society to the next and can be altered. This assumption about gender and associated traits can significantly affect marital quality. Many individuals who have been given gender labels as a result of biological characteristics may, unfortunately, fall short of the expected behaviour necessary to competently fit into the role attached to them in marriage. Beam et al.'s (2018) study discovered that all marital quality constructs are more strongly correlated in women than men.

- Formal or informal education is another factor that can determine marital quality. Formal education refers to education received in a structured setting, such as a school, while informal education is obtained in a non-formal context, such as the home. Couples who do not share the same values or educational aspirations may find it challenging to communicate and respect one another. Moreover, preferences in the spousal level of intelligence and education vary from one couple to the other. Education may facilitate disinterest, lack of attraction, disrespect and more, depending on the couple's perception. A study by Boertien and Harkonen (2018) reveals that female education is positively related to marriage stability.

This study is, therefore, anchored on attachment theory and life course theory. Attachment theory explains an individual's configuration of the dimension of attachment and the internal working models which relate to personal perception and perception of others (Lauer & Yodanis, 2010). The life course theory predicts that childhood experiences in a family significantly influence marital quality, attitudes, roles, and expectations in adulthood (Amato & DeBoer, 2001).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Marriage is contracted with the hope of enjoying marital bliss characterized by satisfaction, happiness, intimacy, support, harmony, and understanding. However, it is not always so in many homes as physical, emotional, psychological, behavioural, socio-cultural and economic need differences can pose major problems if not well-managed. These problems are even more observable among young couples, influencing disagreement, abuse, separation, divorce, mental health challenges and/or untimely death. For example, Ameyaw et al.'s (2023) research found that marriage breakdown among young couples stems from lack of respect, lack of responsibility, differences in decision-making, family interference, differences in values and beliefs, infidelity, miscommunication, financial burden, loneliness and emotional disturbance, additional responsibility for children, temptation to commit adultery, and uncertainty. These variables, at different times, have been the focus of research of researches on marital stability and quality (Allendorf & Ghimire, 2013; Ameyaw et al., 2023; Animasahun, 2021; Baxter, 2010; Britt & Nazarinia, 2014; Bulanda & Brown, 2007;

Cornelius et al., 2016; Leon & Lino-Crus, 2023; Nurhayati et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2012), still, several need to be investigated to understand and find definite measures of marital quality. This study, therefore, focuses on some socio-psychological determinants of marital quality among young couples in Ibadan, Nigeria, especially investigating the variables from a cultural angle.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study is to examine socio-psychological determinants (relationship quality, communication, mindfulness, spousal choice, gender and education) of marital quality among young couples.

In specific terms, the objectives of this study are the following:

1. To investigate the pattern of relationship that exists between relationship quality, communication, mindfulness, spousal choice, gender, education and marital quality among young couples.
2. To predict the effect of relationship quality, communication, mindfulness, spousal choice, gender, and education on marital quality among young couples.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Three research questions were raised and tested at a 0.05 level of significance. They are:

1. What is the pattern of relationship that exists between relationship quality, communication, mindfulness, spousal choice, gender, education and marital quality among the young?
2. How do the independent variables predict marital quality among young couples?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study will contribute to the body of research that provides a source of knowledge for intending and married couples, marriage counsellors and psychologists, researchers in the field of family and child counselling, religious leaders and other stakeholders that are, in one way or another, involved in marital issues in the society. Adequate knowledge of determinants of marital quality will assist this group of people in preparing for married life, providing apt counselling and support and designing how to chart a way forward for family living and wellbeing. In addition, it allows people not to excuse every challenge experienced in the home on curses and spiritual forces.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a correlation cross-sectional survey research that has four psychological determinants (relationship quality, communication, mindfulness, and spousal choice) and two social determinants (gender and education). It utilized a simple random sampling technique to select 300 respondents across five selected local government areas in Ibadan. Respondents' eligibility was marriage contracted between less than one (>1) year and five (5) years. The study employed a self-structured questionnaire as a tool for data collection to ensure the reliability of the study's outcome. The questionnaire was divided into six (6) sections. Section A - respondent's demographic characteristics, with the other sections were designed on a 5-Likert scale. Section B – Marital Quality (MQ) – 15 items, reliability score of 0.87. Section C - Marital Communication (MC) -10 items, with a reliability score of 0.79. Section D: Relationship Quality (RQ) - 7 items, with a reliability score of 0.85. Section E: Mindfulness (M) - 8 items, with a reliability score of 0.91. Section F: Spousal Choice (SC)- 10 items, with a reliability score of 0.84. Two research assistants were employed with the data collection

process lasted for a period of three weeks. Pearson Correlation, ANOVA and Linear Regression were used to test the research hypotheses arising from the research questions for the study.

Ethical considerations

Oral consent was secured from the respondents. The respondents were asked if their marriage was within the bracket of one year to five years to ascertain eligibility. They were informed about the purpose of the research before administering the questionnaire. The respondents were guaranteed the confidentiality of their information.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section covers the first research question: what is the correlation between relationship quality, communication, mindfulness, spousal choice, gender, education and marital quality among young couples?

Table 1.
Pair-wise Correlations among Variables

	M. Quality (MQ)	R. Quality (RQ)	Comm. (C)	Mindfulness (M)	Spousal Choice (SC)	Education (E)	Gender (G)
MQ	1	0,323**	0,121**	0.349**	-0.200	0.072	0.199**
RQ		1	0.038	0.092	-0.119*	-0.027	-0.066
C			1	0.015	0.057	0.077	0.203**
M				1	0.089	0.025	-0.052
SC					1	-0.092	0.151**
E						1	0.085

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 1.0 shows that there is a significant positive relationship between marital quality and relationship quality (r = 0.323**), a significant positive relationship between marital quality and communication (r = 0.121**), a significant positive relationship between marital quality and mindfulness (0.349**), a not significant negative relationship between marital quality and spousal choice, (r = -0.200), a not significant positive relationship between marital quality and education (r = 0.072), and a significant negative relationship between marital quality and gender (r = -0.199**). There is a not significant positive relationship between relationship quality and communication among respondents (r = 0.038), a not significant positive relationship between relationship quality and mindfulness (r = 0.092), a significant negative relationship between relationship quality and spousal (r = -0.199*), a not significant negative relationship between relationship quality and level of education (r = -0.027), and a not significant negative relationship between relationship quality and gender (r = -0.066). There is also a not significant positive relationship between marital communication and mindfulness (r = 0.015), not significant positive relationship between communication and spousal choice (r = 0.057), a not significant positive relationship between communication and level of education (r = 0.077), and a significant positive relationship between

communication and gender (r = 0.203**). It also reveals that mindfulness and spousal choice are positively but not significantly related (r = 0.089), mindfulness and level of education positively but not significantly related (r = 0.025), mindfulness and gender are negatively and not significantly related (-0.052).

Further along, what is the effect of Relationship Quality, Communication, Spousal Choice, Mindfulness, Gender, Education on marital quality among young couples in Ibadan, Nigeria?

Table 2.
Model Summary and ANOVA from Regression Results

R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R Durbin-Watson	F-stat (sig)
.647ª	0.489	0.474	1.629	19.814 (.000)

a. Dependent Variable: Marital Quality
b. Predictors: (Constant), Relationship Quality, Communication, Spousal Choice, Mindfulness, Gender, Education.

Table 2 shows that the R square is 48.9%, the adjusted R square is 47.4%, F-stats is 19.814 (.000), and Durbin-Watson is 1.629. The results imply that the F-stats, which test for the joint/ overall significance of Relationship Quality, Communication, Spousal Choice, Mindfulness, Gender, and Education on the dependent variable, shows that there exists a statistically significant relationship among the variables in the model (F-stats = 19.814, P = .000). This implies that Relationship Quality, Communication, Spousal Choice, Mindfulness, Gender, Education exerted a significant effect on marital quality among young couples. Therefore, all the selected variables were jointly significant in determining marital quality among young couples.

The adjusted R^2 showed that the regression explains 47.4% of the variance in the data. This implies that Relationship Quality, Communication, Spousal Choice, Mindfulness, Gender, and Education explained 47.4% of the dependent variables, and there are other 52.6% explanatory variables that determine marital quality that were not accounted for in this study. The Durbin-Watson (d = 1.629) falls between the values of 1.5 < d < 2.5. This Durbin-Watson, therefore, assumes that there is the first order of linear auto-correlation in the model.

DISCUSSION

This study investigates psychological (relationship quality, communication, mindfulness, choice of spouse) and social (gender and education) determinants of marital quality among young couples.

The findings reveal that relationship quality, communication, and mindfulness are positively related to the quality of marriage, while spousal choice is negatively related. This corroborates Haris and Kumar's (2018) result, which revealed that frequency of successful communication, understanding between spouses and empathy were positively related to relationship quality and stability. It is also in line with Ledermann et al.'s (2010) investigation that confirmed that destructive communication, such as criticism, defensiveness, contempt and stonewalling, were all found to be significantly and negatively correlated with marital firmness and set a couple on a course toward divorce. It further supports Allendorf and Ghimire's (2013) result that discovered that satisfaction, communication and togetherness are three great factors that positively and significantly determine marital quality. Although, education level positively correlates with quality of marriage but not at a significant rate. This implies that higher education may bring about good marriage quality. Furthermore, spouses with higher education may have better marital quality. This is relatively reported in Boertien and

Harkonen's (2018) study which states that female education is positively related to marriage stability.

Gender difference is negatively related to the quality of marriage. This connotes that males and females may experience satisfaction, happiness, and love in marriage differently. In a similar study by Beam et al. (2018), they observed that all marital quality constructs are more strongly correlated in women than men. Notably, decision-making correlated more strongly with overall satisfaction constructs (i.e., marital satisfaction and sexual intimacy) and marital adjustment constructs (i.e., agreement, support, and harmony) in women than men. Women's overall perceptions of marital quality – both overall satisfaction and adjustment constructs – may depend more strongly on marital interactions (e.g., problem-solving approaches) than men's overall perceptions of marital quality. This study is also similar to the study carried out by Allendorf and Ghimire (2013) in Nepal, which revealed that gender, education, and spousal choice play an important role in determining marital quality. According to them, men, those with higher education, and those who participated in the choice of their spouse have higher levels of marital quality. They further discovered that caste, occupation, age at marriage, marital duration, and number of children have little to no association with marital quality but gender, education, and spouse choice emerge as key determinants of marital quality.

Also, it was discovered that almost all the respondents enjoyed good marital quality. This is characterized as happy, stable, harmonious and friendly. They reported understanding each other's emotional, sexual, and psychological needs. This assertion is generated from the result that revealed that 94% confirmed their partners understand their sexual needs; 94% love to discuss and share their plans, problems, and mistakes with their spouse, 92% said their partners understand what they value in life and about 85% said their partners have much more affection for them, and about 95% appreciate the sacrifices their partners have been making.

It was further revealed that relationship quality, communication and mindfulness positively determined marital quality, while spousal choice negatively determined marital quality. Education, which positively relates to marital quality, is not highly significant, while gender, which negatively relates to marital quality, exerted a statistically significant effect on marital quality among the respondents. Also, relationship quality, communication, mindfulness, spousal choice, and gender exerted a statistically significant relationship on the quality of marriage ($p < 0.05$). This implies that all the selected variables jointly determined and measured marital quality among young couples.

CONCLUSION

Relationship quality, communication, and mindfulness positively and statistically influence marital quality significantly. The results of this study categorise these as the key components of marital quality. A marriage that can be termed satisfactory and blissful must possess good and effective communication, concern for one another, and meeting each other's needs. Partners who continue to build good communication skills and desire to communicate their partner's love language are more likely to have a fulfilling marriage. The study also revealed that education, which positively relates to marital quality, is not highly significant. Finally, the study showed a significant difference in male and female marriage quality determination.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Couples should build effective communication with one other as it is a key factor when measuring marital quality.
2. Couples should be in tune to each other's needs and desires. These needs - sexual, emotional, and psychological needs are essential factor in marital quality. They couples should be willing to work on their relationship when there are challenges.
3. Families and intending couples should seek counsel from professional counsellors and psychologists on issues pertaining to harmonious living, self-regulation, assertiveness, interpersonal skills, abuse and others.
4. Couples should be discipline in grooming, attending to each other's health and creating novel activities that keeps their spouse interested and fascinated.
5. In marriage, the spouse is the first priority and should be treated as such. Third parties' interference should always be a last resort and only if it is necessary to save a union.

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